CIIR press release

TL 1707

BISHOP BELO SPEAKS OUT ON XANANA'S DETENTION & TORTURE

The Catholic Bishop of Dili, East Timor, Bishop Carlos Belo, spoke out last week about the arrest of resistance leader Xanana Gusmao in an interview with the Portuguese Newspaper, 'Publico'. The Indonesian authorities had released a video in which Xanana, looking pale and drawn and looking down, affirms that East Timor is part of Indonesia, and appeals to remaining guerrillas in the mountains to give themselves up to the Indonesian army.

'For the past seventeen years if anyone spoke in the way that Xanana had spoken, it must be as a result of torture', the Bishop said. Bishop Belo also denounced the disinformation spread by the military regarding a Christmas pastoral letter which they had said he was planning, in which he would appeal to guerrillas to give up their arms in local churches in return for an amnesty granted by the military governor, General Syafei. He reaffirmed his belief that only a referendum held on the future of the territory would enable the Timorese to decide their political future.

Amnesty International has continued to express extreme concern at the numerous arrests and detentions currently taking place inside East Timor. Twenty of Gusmao's close relatives have been detained. At least one, Jorge Manuel Araujo Serrano, has been tortured to death, and at least two of the women detained in Dili have been raped in custody. The International Committee of the Red Cross have been allowed to see Xanana once, but have been denied access to the rest of the prisoners, as have independent lawyers. The following information was obtained from church sources inside East Timor on 8 December:

'The tortures are going on every day. There has never been anything like it. Numerous people have been beaten, and some put to death, all of this continues. There is complete confirmation of everything Amnesty International has been saying since the capture of Xanana Gusmao, only things are far, far worse than that. Numerous people have been arrested and a significant number have been forced to betray others after being tortured. The reality is far worse than observers can see from the surface. You can tell the whole world that there is no doubt about the torture and atrocities the Indonesians are committing at present. The torture even extends to the private parts of boys and girls, men and women...the Indonesians continue to call people in for interrogation and torture. In quite a number of cases the torture is so terrible that people defect to the Indonesian side. Many people who are released look like zombies.... the lines to the prisons are tremendous, one after another people are sent in. The beatings and tortures are out of this world.

Despite all this, the spirit of the young people, their desire for freedom, is more firm than before. When people are not broken by the torture, they are firm in their perspectives. For now, people are only free to pray and to think.'

Talks under UN auspices are due to take place between the Indonesian and Portuguese governments on 17 December. Portugal has demanded repeatedly that Timorese leaders should be included. There is no more appropriate candidate than Xanana himself, leader and inspiration to the East Timorese struggle for independence over the last seventeen years.

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10.12.92

Catholic Institute
for International Relations